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AIDAC

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AFR/SA FOR ELOKEN, LDOBBINS, JKOLE

DCHA/OFDA FOR KLUU, ACONVERY, TDENYSENKO, LTHOMAS

DCHA/FFP FOR JBURNS, JDWORKEN, LPETERSON, ASINK

PRETORIA FOR JWESSEL, GJUSTE

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SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE - GOZ SUSPENDS CARE ACTIVITIES

SUMMARY

¶11. (U) After months of harassment of the non-governmental organization (NGO) CARE's staff by "war veterans," military and other officials, Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) Minister Nicholas Goche informed CARE on May 28 to immediately suspend its operations.

Goche accused CARE staff of meddling in political activities favoring the opposition, and said CARE would be suspended until investigations were completed. CARE is pursuing further clarification regarding terms of the suspension and the investigation process, but it seems clear the suspension will last at least until the Presidential run-off election scheduled for June

¶127. CARE believes, based on the Minister's comments that he intends to suspend other NGOs as well. This comes at a time when CARE and other NGOs have been trying to meet acute humanitarian needs of thousands of people displaced by political violence and intimidation.

BACKGROUND

¶12. (U) CARE has been providing assistance to Zimbabwe for many years, and has been one of the major players in responding to the humanitarian crisis that has existed since 2002. CARE receives funding from several donors, including support from USAID's Office of Food for Peace`}T-poxn for Democratic Change (MDC) won the majority of seats in the March 29 parliamentary elections. Not surprisingly, these areas in Masvingo where MDC candidates won have been particularly hard hit by the post-election wave of violence.

¶13. (U) Shortly after the March 29 elections, in several separate incidents, CARE offices in various districts and at the provincial level in Masvingo received demands to stop operations and threats to staff by persons identifying themselves as "war veterans" and out-of-uniform military officers. These people repeatedly made claims (unspecified and unsubstantiated) that CARE staff was engaging in political activities in support of the MDC, essentially scapegoating CARE for ZANU-PF's political defeats.

¶14. (U) To try to resolve the problem, CARE had several communications, through meetings and letters, with various GOZ officials over the past two months, including Masvingo Governor Chiwewe. While Governor Chiwewe repeated the same vague allegations that CARE staff was engaging in political activities in support of the MDC, as recently as May 19, he sent CARE a letter stating that the GOZ had NOT stopped CARE's activities and would continue to support its programs. However, two days later CARE was informed by a Department head within the Ministry of Public Service, Labor and

Social Welfare (MPSLSW) that the issue had been taken up to Cabinet level and that CARE would need to meet with the MPSLSW Minister, Nicholas Goche.

MEETING WITH MINISTER GOCHE

15. (U) On May 28, CARE met with Minister Goche. Goche made several allegations against CARE: (1) that CARE had stopped activities before the elections (for political reasons); (2) that one of the GOZ vice presidents had shown him election campaign pamphlets that CARE was distributing; (3) that CARE told people that voting for ZANU-PF was "suicide"; and (4) that CARE had violated their MOU with the MPSLSW. Goche then concluded that while these allegations were being looked into, all CARE operations would be suspended. The Minister also told CARE that he planned to call other NGOs to a meeting to suspend their activities.

FOLLOW-UP AND IMPLICATIONS

16. (SBU) CARE FOLLOW-UP: CARE intends to write a letter to Minister Goche seeking to clarify: (1) the terms of the suspension (e.g., permissible levels of field presence and staff movement), and (2) the investigation process (e.g., timeframes and what CARE can do to expedite the process). CARE also plans to raise the issue through the UN channel to seek support. At this point CARE is not

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17. (SBU) UNHC FOLLOW-UP: The CARE issue was raised by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) at a UN/Donors Group Meeting on May 129. The HC also reported that the Minister planned to call a few other NGOs to a meeting on June 2 and suspend their activities as well. The HC listed specific NGOs that would be targeted, although this was based on speculation and not on information provided by Goche. These NGOs included SCF/UK, Concern, Plan International, Oxfam and World Vision. (NOTE: To date, we have no reports of other NGOs being summoned. END NOTE.) Finally, the HC assured donors that he would take the issue up with the GOZ at the highest level necessary.

18. (U) FIELD IMPACTS: The USAID-supported CARE activities affected include school feeding, institutional feeding, and food-for-assets projects. Other donor-funded activities put on hold include agricultural support programs, home-based care, OVC activities, water/sanitation, and micro-credit. CARE was also part of a joint response to address recent acute needs of people displaced by political violence and intimidation. CARE did not have plans to do large-scale food distribution (Vulnerable Group Feeding) until August so this area is not impacted for the moment by the GOZ's actions.

WARREN